

A Melodrama—the Union

By T. Baron Russell

I

Is it not almost unprintable? To give to it anything of actuality one would have—no, not to invent, but to suppress. As a bit of life it was too impossibly dramatic, too fictional, too much—what can one say?—too much like a story in a Christmas number, and a story constructed in the worst style, at that.

Yet, it happened! and the Organist is my witness. She had taken me to see the Workhouse Chapel: incidentally, to hear her play (for which purpose one would go much further than to this chapel), little purposing, as you may believe, to give me sheer Surrey melodrama thrown in. The beadle admitted us by a little door, cut in the black painted wooden gates. He admitted us with a smile. A Union Beadle *can* smile on occasion, and I was to find soon that the coming of the Organist was the signal for many smiles in this “Union.” One or two inmates were waiting in the paved courtyard. They all smiled, too, at sight of the Organist, and hovered forward to greet her. One man had a crutch, and walked with difficulty, but he shuffled quickly over the flagstones, and followed us with the others into the chapel, where a good number were already waiting—just so many vacant-looking, tired